



## [The United States and the European Union Raise Concerns Over a Recent Uptick in Human Rights Abuses by Ugandan Security Forces](#)

The United States and the European Union have recently raised alarms over allegations of torture by Ugandan security forces. The catalyst for their concern is the reports of a Ugandan writer and government critic, Kakwenza Rukirabashaija. The novelist posted photos of the deep scars on his back, drawing anger and outrage from human rights activists. Rukirabashaija claims that he was tortured for weeks until a magistrate ordered him to be freed late last month. He was later denied his passport after release. This is just one of the many cases in a notable recent uptick of human rights abuses in Uganda. For more than a year, there has been a significant increase in arbitrary arrests, forced disappearances, harassment, and torture. There have also been reports of attacks against human and environmental rights activists. Rukirabashaija has fled Uganda, and is currently being charged with “offensive communication” due to a remark that he made regarding President Yoweri Museveni’s son.

Rukirabashaija is a satirical novelist, his most acclaimed work being “The Greedy Barbarian,” which won him a PEN Pinter Prize for International Writers of Courage award last year. Much of his writing tackles the themes of corruption and greed. His pieces have been widely interpreted to reference the political life of Museveni. Rukirabashaija has been jailed twice before over his criticism of Museveni’s failures. The U.S. Treasury has taken actions against Uganda before, sanctioning Ugandan officials who have been credibly accused of human rights abuses. This recent uptick in repression against dissent in Uganda has raised international concern. Despite this, the United States still provides Uganda with nearly \$1 billion annually in development and security assistance.

President Museveni was once championed by the world as part of a new generation of leaders in Africa. He had previously criticized leaders for not stepping down from power. However, ironically, he has now been in power since 1986 and has removed term and age limits on the presidency in Uganda. In a recent show of defiance, Museveni has appointed a former military intelligence chief who is blacklisted by the United States over human rights abuses to become the head of the police. Kakwenza Rukirabashaija has fled Uganda, moving temporarily to an unnamed European country. He will likely receive medical attention for his wounds there. Eron Kiiza, Rukirabashaija’s lawyer, said “Conditions had become impossible for him. They kept surveilling him. They took away his passport. He had no option but to go and save his life.”

This string of recent torture allegations is likely to place a strain on relations between Uganda and both the United States and the European Union. U.S. ties with Uganda have been good since Museveni took power, but many activists in America will likely call for more accountability and harsher punishments of Ugandan officials who take part in torture or other human rights abuses. The European Union issued a statement expressing concerns over torture allegations; “a situation that for more than a year has seen a significant increase of reports of torture, arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, harassment” and other crimes against humanity. Thus, there is a sentiment that accountability needs to be demanded for growing human rights abuses in Uganda.